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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [LG](#)

SUBJECT: RIGA DENIES PERMITS FOR MARCH 16 EVENTS

REF: RIGA 122

¶1. Concerned about security, the City of Riga has denied permits both to organizations planning to commemorate the Latvian "Legionnaires" on March 16, and to opponents planning counter-demonstrations. The decision to deny the permits this year was a change of course from previous years. On March 13, the regional court rejected all appeals of the City's decision. One of the organizers of the march predicted that while they would not officially hold the event without a permit, many participants would show up regardless. Linda Murniece, the new Interior Minister, has promised the police will be rigorous in enforcing order. Police have pledged a robust presence to ensure no disturbances occur.

¶2. Each year on March 16, some Latvians march through Riga's Old Town to commemorate the service of Latvians who fought with the Nazis against the Soviets. Russia and many ethnic Russians in Latvia emphasize the unit's connection with the Nazis, while the Latvian participants emphasize the unit's opposition to Soviet occupation. Riots in the Old Town in January sparked accusations that the police were unprepared to handle an unruly crowd. With economic misery running high and some signs of increased ethnic tension (see reftel), the City has calculated that the March 16 events would create another situation that could get out of control. Denying the permits is a reasonable step, but whether it will be sufficient remains to be seen.

¶3. Post is issuing a warden message to the American community informing them of the potential for protests on March 16 and noting that the permits have been denied but appeals were still possible.

ROGERS